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**FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

**Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> St., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554**

In the Matter of

Application by BellSouth )  
Corporation for Authorization )  
To Provide In-Region, InterLATA )  
Services in the States of Georgia )  
And Louisiana.

Docket No. 01-277 /

**Comments of  
Harry C. Alford  
President/CEO  
National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.  
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October 17, 2001

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## I. Position -

The National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc. is both proud and pleased to submit comments in support of the application by BellSouth Corporation for authorization under Section 271 of the Communications Act to provide In-Region, InterLATA services in the states of Georgia and Louisiana. The NBCC is the largest Black business association in the world. We have 207 chapters located in 40 states and 8 nations. We have direct access to over 85,000 Black owned businesses and proudly represent the 850,000 Black owned businesses located within the United States. We strongly believe that BellSouth's entry into the long distance market in the states of Georgia and Louisiana will open up the marketplace and provide greater availability and lower rates for local, long distance and data services. This will benefit all consumers especially African Americans who use long distance services at a much higher rate than the average American.

Approval of this application will also help close the "digital divide" that is currently in existence. African American businesses are utilizing the Internet at a rate that is only 4% of the total. Providing more availability and lower rates will help invite more Black entrepreneurs into the world of the Internet. Our constituency will be better equipped and more competitive and thus will experience economic prosperity. This will improve the overall American economy and provide greater opportunity for employment – jobs where they are needed the most.

We respectfully request the Commission to quickly approve BellSouth's 271 application. Our economy thrives on competition and the opportunity of choice.

Improving service to residents as well as businesses will be quite beneficial to the people and the economy of Georgia and Louisiana.

## II. Statement of Interests –

The National Black Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity within the United States and via interaction with the Black Diaspora. The NBCC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of African American communities. Throughout the 1990's, African American businesses in the U.S. posted sales of more than \$80 billion annually. In general, African Americans represent an annual spending base of over \$500 billion. The NBCC has harnessed much of the power of these dollars and provides unique opportunities for corporations and African American businesses to partner in creating greater opportunity for all people.

In order to fulfill our mission and achieve our goals, the NBCC designs its programs to be solutions to the current challenges faced by the Black business community. The following is an example of our current programs: Annual Conventions, Management Seminars, Trade Missions, E-Commerce, Direct Access X-Change, Corporate Partnering, Policy & Advocacy, Technical Support, International Marketing, Individualized Representation, Etc.

Specifically, there are 55,766 Black owned businesses in Georgia and 25,782 in Louisiana (US Census, 1997). The NBCC has direct contact with 1,523 and 530

businesses respectively in these two states. We have chapters in Georgia located in Atlanta, Columbus, Augusta, Savannah and Noonan. In Louisiana, we have chapters located in New Orleans, Lafayette, Monroe, Shreveport and Baton Rouge. We also have a regional office located in New Orleans. The NBCC has a vested interest in promoting policy that will be conducive to business growth and will create an environment friendly to small business.

### III. Benefits of Competition and Availability –

Competition from Broadband, Internet Service Providers, Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (CLECs) and Long Distance will help make the economy robust. Consumers will greatly benefit from BellSouth's entry into these two markets. The competitive pressures which will result from a new significant player in these expanding markets will drive all telecommunication companies to become innovative in the services and products they offer.

BellSouth has further committed to provide a full range of services to the residential customers throughout the state. Urban, rural and minority residential customers, as well as small and large businesses, will benefit from the company's commitment to serve all regions of each state with a bundle of services. This commitment will cause other long distance providers to become more aggressive and generous in its bundle of services being offered to both the residential and business communities.

The dynamic forces of BellSouth's long distance entry into the Georgia and Louisiana markets will foster competitive activities, through more services and products at lower costs, for all consumers in Georgia and Louisiana.

#### IV. Corporate Responsibility –

For decades, BellSouth has led the telecommunications industry in diversity and best practices. This corporation has demonstrated time and time again that “inclusion” is a valuable resource and best serves the American Economy. Most recently, Fortune Magazine ranked BellSouth #10 on its list of “America's 50 Best Companies for Minorities”. This distinction is well deserved.

Here are just a few more highlights that demonstrate BellSouth's commitment to inclusion:

- BellSouth established a Chairman's Diversity Council more than three years ago with the goal of increasing diversity and awareness with the company.
- In January 2001, the Diversity Council appointed Ron Frieson as the company's Chief Diversity Officer.
- BellSouth has in place several employee-networking groups such as BNAT, BellSouth Network of African American Telecommunications Professionals, that play a vital role in the company's commitment to inclusion.
- In 2001, the NAACP recognized BellSouth for its exemplary business practices and public service by awarding the company the Corporate Image Award.

- BellSouth has made the aforementioned Fortune List for four consecutive years.

#### V. Conclusion –

We firmly believe that the benefits derived from BellSouth's entry into the long distance market in Georgia and Louisiana will be touched by all entities within the demographics of these two fine states. It will benefit the availability and affordability of long distance and, most importantly, all levels of competition for telecommunication services. Again, we urge the Commission's approval of BellSouth's 271 application for Georgia and Louisiana.

The Commission's approval of this application will be consistent with its goals that were set via the implementation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Accessibility (urban and rural), affordability, choice and variations of bundled services will promote the economy and increase the quality of life for the citizens of Georgia and Louisiana. The approval of this application is in the public's interest and is supported fully by the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

Respectfully submitted,

  
HARRY C. ALFORD  
President/CEO

National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.